

Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6757

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1723

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA, US

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MFA CHEF DE CABINET SOUBANH

SUMMARY: AT BASTILLE DAY RECEPTION, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CHEF DE CABINET SOUBANH SRITHIRATH IMPLIED EMBASSY WAS ENLARGING
ITS STAFF WITHOUT NOTIFYING LPDR; THREATENED TO REDUCE SIZE OF
AMERICAN MISSION; SAID SINCE U.S. "HAD NOTHING FOR LAOS"
THERE WASN'T MUCH BASIS FOR RELATIONSHIP; ACCUSED U.S. OF
INTRUDING INTO LAO AIR SPACE; AND DESCRIBED CONCERN WITH MIA
QUESTION AS INDICATION AMERICA WAS INTERESTED ONLY IN THE PAST.
END SUMMARY.

1. AT BASTILLE DAY RECEPTION, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CHEF DE CABINET SOUBANH SRITHIRATH, BEGINNING IN THE PRESENCE OF
TWO OTHER FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS AND LATER PRIVATELY, SPOKE
BLUNTLY TO PAO ON A NUMBER OF MATTERS THAT COULD AFFECT
U.S.-LAO RELATIONS.

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2. UPON LEARNING THAT PAO WAS ABOUT TO DEPART LAOS ON COMPLETION

OF TOUR, SOUBANH ASKED HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE REPLACING HIM AND WHAT WAS THE SIZE OF THE MISSION. PAO SAID THAT U.S. EMBASSY STOOD AT 27, AS IT HAS FOR SOME TIME.

3. "YOU ARE BRINGING IN MORE PEOPLE; BEFORE YOU ONLY HAD TWELVE. THAT IS THE ONLY NUMBER WE HAVE." SOUBANH WENT ON TO SAY THAT ANYBODY NOT ON THE DIPLOMATIC LIST WOULD HAVE TO LEAVE. WHEN PRESSED AS TO WHETHER OTHER MISSIONS, SUCH AS THE SOVIETS, HAD ALL THEIR PERSONNEL ON THE DIPLOMATIC LIST, SOUBANH ON THE ONE HAND SAID THIS ADMONITION APPLIED TO EVERYONE AND ON THE OTHER HAND ADMITTED THAT THERE WERE "ADMINISTRATIVE" PERSONNEL WHO MIGHT NOT BE ON THE LIST. HOWEVER, ALL THESE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE TO BE REPORTED TO THE LPDR AND HE IMPLIED U.S. MISSION HAD NOT COMPLIED WITH THIS REQUIREMENT. PAO REJOINED THAT EMBASSY ADVISES MFA BY DIPLOMATIC NOTE OF EVERY ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF PERMANENTLY ASSIGNED AMERICAN STAFF MEMBERS.

4. SOUBANH THEN SAID SINCE THE U.S. HAD "NOTHING FOR LAOS", THERE WASN'T ANYTHING FOR IT (MISSION) TO DO AND SEEMED TO BE SAYING THERE COULDN'T BE MUCH OF A RELATIONSHIP. PAO POINTED OUT THAT EACH COUNTRY HAD AN EMBASSY IN THE OTHER'S CAPITAL; THAT THE U.S. FOR ITS PART WAS TRYING TO OPERATE A NORMAL DIPLOMATIC MISSION, WHICH DID NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO INCLUDE AN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM; AND THAT AMERICA LOOKED TO THE FUTURE AND THE EFFECTS OF TIME TO BRING ABOUT AN IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.-LAO RELATIONS.

5. SOUBANH ACCUSED THE U.S. OF FAILING TO LIVE UP TO ITS "PROMISE" TO AID IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LAOS. "WHAT ABOUT THE AGREEMENT THAT WAS SIGNED?" HE ASKED. PAO SAID THE PARIS AGREEMENTS ON VIET-NAM HAD BEEN VIOLATED AND POINTED OUT THAT THE U.S. WAS NOT A SIGNATORY TO THE VIENTIANE ACCORDS OF 1973. SOUBANH THEN QUOTED A STATEMENT HE ATTRIBUTED TO SECRETARY KISSINGER TO THE EFFECT THAT THE U.S. EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REBUILDING OF LAOS.

6. AT THIS POINT SOMBAT CHOULAMANY, DIRECTOR OF DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS AT MFA, INTERRUPTED BY ASKING PAO WHETHER HE WOULD FORGET THE LAO LANGUAGE WHILE IN WASHINGTON. PAO REPLIED THAT PERHAPS HE WOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE

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LAO EMBASSY THERE AND ASKED HOW MANY OFFICERS WERE NOW ASSIGNED THERE. "NOT MANY," SOUBANH SAID. "MAYBE YOU (AMERICANS) WILL HAVE TO GO SO THAT YOU WILL HAVE THE SAME NUMBER AS WE DO IN WASHINGTON." PAO ANSWERED THAT LPDR WAS FREE TO DO WHAT IT WISHED.

7. PAO THEN ASKED SOUBANH WHY HE COULDN'T LOOK TO THE FUTURE. IF THE LPDR WISHED, AS ITS LEADERS HAVE OFTEN STATED, TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., HOW DID VIRULENT ANTI-U.S. MEDIA PROPAGANDA

GANDA SERVE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS? SOUBANH REPLIED THAT THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE COULD BE GLEANED FROM THE PAST. HE DENIED LAO MEDIA OUTPUT WAS INFLAMMATORY; THOSE WHO WERE CASTIGATE DESERVED IT.

8. SOUBANH THEN ASKED WHY U.S. WAS STILL VIOLATING LAO AIRSPACE BY OVERFLIGHTS. PAO STRESSED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO VIOLATIONS AND REMINDED SOUBANH THAT MISSION OFFICERS HAD REPEATEDLY ASKED TO SEE PROOF OF THESE AND OTHER CHARGES.

9. PAO BROUGHT UP POST-WW II RELATIONS BETWEEN U.S. AND JAPAN AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TWO COUNTRIES HAD BEEN ABLE TO OVERCOME PAST HOSTILITY AND HAD LOOKED TO THE FUTURE. (AT THAT POINT PRC AMBASSADOR WARMLY GREETED PAO, WHO AGAIN REITERATED POINT THAT U.S. AND "OTHERS" WERE WILLING TO OVERLOOK PREVIOUS CONTENTIOUSNESS.)

10. SOUBANH ANSWERED, "YOU SAY YOU WISH TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE; THEN WHY ARE YOU ASKING ABOUT THE MIA'S? YOU WISH TO LOOK TOWARD THE PAST. WHY ARE YOU ONLY INTERESTED IN YOUR DEAD? WHY AREN'T YOU INTERESTED IN OUR DEAD?"

11. SOUBANH ALSO PAID TRIBUTE TO "FRIENDSHIP" BETWEEN THE LAO AND AMERICAN PEOPLES; PAO SAID IN THE U.S. THE GOVERNMENT AT PEOPLE WERE ONE. SOUBANH "HUMBLY" CONFESSED NOT REALLY TO KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE U.S., AND THEN BROUGHT UP 1971 ANTI-VIETNAM WAR DEMONSTRATIONS AS INDICATION THAT AMERICAN PEOPLE OPPOSED THEIR GOVERNMENT. PAO TOLD SOUBANH THAT BECAUSE PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON VIET-NAM HAD CHANGED, THE USG HAD RESPONDED. SOUBANH ADMITTED THAT A CHANGE HAD OCCURRED BUT MAINTAINED THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAD BEEN "DECEIVED" (DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF VN WAR).

12. COMMENT: A FRENCH COLLEAGUE THE SAME EVENING DESCRIBED SOUBANH AS FOLLOWS: "HE BARKS AND YELPS LIKE A DOG...I BELIEVE HIM
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TO BEA RATHER IMPORTANT MAN, THOUGH. HE SAYS THINGS THAT PERHAPS OTHERS (HIGHER UP)...CANNOT SAY FOR THEMSELVES." IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER SOUBANH WAS MERELY VENTING ACCUMULATED SPLEEN OR WHETHER HIS REMARKS PREFIGURE A NEW AND HIGHER LEVEL OF LPDR HOSTILITY TOWARD THE EMBASSY. THIS PERFORMANCE BY SOUBANH HIGHLIGHTS THE BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN U.S. AND LPDR CONCEPTS OF

WHAT OUR DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS
ALL ABOUT AND UNDERLINES THE
SUSPICION WITH WHICH THE LPDR REGARDS OUR PRESENT LEVEL OF REPRESENTATION. WE SHALL HAVE FURTHER COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN DUE COURSE.
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